

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 391 184

CS 509 110

AUTHOR Reppert, James E.
TITLE Improving Relationships between College and High School Forensics Programs: Three Case Studies and a Regional Survey.
PUB DATE Oct 91
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association (77th, Atlanta, GA, October 31-November 3, 1991).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Case Studies; *College School Cooperation; Communication Skills; *Debate; Higher Education; *High Schools; *High School Students; *Outreach Programs
IDENTIFIERS Debate Tournaments; Kentucky; Nevada

ABSTRACT

The importance of the bond between secondary and higher education forensics programs cannot be overstated. For many high school students, involving themselves in debate and individual events can result in a partial or full college scholarship. Of equal importance is the benefit of participation in an extracurricular activity that enhances writing and speaking skills. Several forensics commentators have assessed the state of high school and university cooperation in various parts of the country. Robert J. Glenn, III, for instance, calls for the need for regional organization and more involvement by the National Forensics League in northwest Kentucky. He also suggests that a new debate style that would focus on the quality and content of argumentation rather than speed of delivery be given serious consideration by small and medium-sized colleges and universities. Minh A. Luong reviews the mutually beneficial relationship between University of California Berkeley and the northern California High School Forensics Community. He explains how college teams can intern as high school coaches, giving novice speakers needed advice from seasoned competitors. He also reviews the success of Berkeley's summer speech institute. Thomas Murphy discusses the obstacles to urban outreach in the University of Nevada Las Vegas (UNLV) and Southern Nevada high schools. He believes that a UNLV-sponsored debate workshop is a realistic, inexpensive form of outreach. (TB)

* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *

Speech Communication Association Convention
October 31-November 3, 1991
Atlanta, Georgia

"Improving Relationships Between College and High School
Forensics Programs: Three Case Studies and a
Regional Survey."
(American Forensic Association)

James E. Reppert
Department of Theatre and Mass Communication
Southern Arkansas University
SAU Box 1229
Magnolia, Arkansas 71753-5000

Phone: (501) 235-4258
Fax: (501) 235-5005
E-mail: jereppert@saumag.edu

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

- ☒ This document has been reproduced as
received from the person or organization
originating it.
- ☐ Minor changes have been made to
improve reproduction quality.

- Points of view or opinions stated in this
document do not necessarily represent
official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS
MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

J. E. Reppert

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

The importance of the bond between secondary and higher education forensics programs cannot be overstated. For many high school students, involving themselves in debate and individual events activities can result in a partial or full college scholarship. Of equal importance is the benefit of participation in an extracurricular activity which enhances writing and speaking skills. As a result, ensuring positive relationships between college and high school forensics programs needs to be a dynamic process which ultimately can produce highly literate and articulate college graduates.

As the respondent to this program, I have read in papers presented in this panel how some college forensics directors have instituted various recruiting and outreach programs to their respective regional and local high schools. However, are these activities exceptions to the rule? A number of factors are involved in the equation. Some active high school programs may be located in areas where community colleges or universities have little funding or interest in collegiate forensics activities. While its educational significance may be high, financial exigencies or institutional priorities often take precedence.

We know as professors and forensics directors that students who participate in speech activities are often as skilled in mastering their studies. Enhancing that focus on scholarship in the junior and senior high school years through various outreach

programs can only benefit student scholarship in higher education. College coaches and team members have unique opportunities to persuade high school speech participants of the long-term academic benefits of forensics. This can be done in many important ways.

The first paper on which I will make comments on comes from Professor Robert J. Glenn, III of Owensboro Community College, titled "The Tristate Region: Revitalizing High School Forensics Activities Through the Collective Effort of Collegiate Programs." One of the most salient points he presents is the need for a regional speech organization in his area. His institution, located in northwest Kentucky, often travels to Illinois, Indiana and Missouri for tournaments. Unfortunately, different state rules and governing bodies do not allow for reciprocal interstate competition in Kentucky. A regional structure would enhance all parties concerned in border areas.

As is the case with Owensboro Community College, most western Kentucky forensics programs are poorly funded, which often exacerbates coach burnout. Some fledgling programs are assigned to faculty members with little interest or knowledge of forensics. Glenn found that while some high school speech teachers are genuinely interested in coaching, many do not have experience in competitive speech activities. In his area, high school novice coaches depend on the forensics programs at Western Kentucky University and Owensboro Community College for assistance.

With three institutions of higher education located in Owensboro, forensics assistance is readily available to high school coaches and team members. At this point, Glenn reports that few Owensboro High School graduates are competing in forensics at the college level. A networking program is taking shape to increase participation at the next level of competition. High school and middle school contacts have been undertaken since 1990 by Glenn and Owensboro Community College through the hosting of both college and high school tournaments. Another local institution, Western Kentucky University, is very active in promoting high school forensics. The WKU forensics program is well-funded as compared to other regional colleges.

Of considerable concern to college and university forensics directors in Kentucky is a lack of future funds to finance their programs and outreach activities to high schools. The Kentucky Educational Reform Act (KERA) could restrain forensics, as it is considered an extracurricular activity. The prime focus of KERA is to funnel money into public education. With most college forensics directors already working on very limited budgets, the long-term educational benefits of intercollegiate forensics in Kentucky apparently have not been considered.

Glenn believe that southern Indiana is ripe for inclusion in high school outreach, as the University of Evansville forensics program has been on hiatus since 1981. There are some high school

speech activities in Evansville and surrounding communities, but no statistics are yet available as to how many of these students eventually participate in intercollegiate forensics.

The conclusions reached by Professor Glenn include the need for a regional organization, and more involvement by the National Forensics League in northwest Kentucky. He also believes a new national debate style, which would focus on the quality and content of argumentation rather than speed of delivery, be given serious consideration by small and medium-sized colleges and universities. This idea would be well-suited for novice high school speech participants who might be scared away by the rapidity of style and lack of eye contact inherent in current collegiate policy and value debate formats.

Professor Minh A. Luong of San Francisco State University made some very impressive points in his paper, "UC-Berkeley and the Northern California High School Forensics Community: A Mutually Beneficial Relationship." This support is cemented in large part by the University of California, Berkeley debate program hosting one of the largest high school invitationals in the United States each year. It is one way to begin recruiting talent to campus, as well as keeping forensics strong in the West. A coaches forum provides invaluable interaction between high school directors and the UC-Berkeley staff.

He posits solid ideas regarding program objectives of reaching

out to high school programs which are applicable to all college forensics directors. Team presentations and demonstrations help to forge an initial two-way communication among high school and college coaches and participants. Members of college teams can often intern as high school coaches, giving novice speakers needed advice from seasoned competitors. Writing articles for state speech journals often leads to direct interaction between high school and college coaches serving as editors or contributors of such publications.

Finally, the availability of summer speech institutes can be extremely valuable. While institutions may have minimal funding for any activities, UC-Berkeley has enjoyed great success in high school outreach by sponsoring such events. It allows for employment of college debaters and gives limitless interaction with high school students. Professor Luong believes higher education administrators must be persuaded of the relevance and low cost of sponsoring these and other types of programs. Institutions potentially benefit long-term if high school graduates who participated in forensics have positive feelings of a college or university which has sponsored numerous local outreach activities.

Professor Thomas L. Murphy, now of Miami University, came to his current position after coaching forensics at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. He discusses the obstacles of urban outreach in "UNLV and Southern Nevada High Schools: A Growing University Works

to Support and Maintain Strong Relations with High School Programs." With the population of Las Vegas growing each year, new high schools are being built at a rapid pace. Relations with new forensics programs is essential to eventually bring young competitors to UNLV.

Murphy reports no change in forensics activity despite the rapid growth of Las Vegas as an entertainment and family recreation area. He has found that Las Vegas high school forensics programs are poorly funded. There are tremendous travel constraints for high school tournaments outside Las Vegas, as it is geographically isolated from the neighboring states of California, Arizona and Utah. Such isolation from regional metropolitan areas makes any travel to high school forensics tournaments outside the Las Vegas area a financial impossibility.

Many talented Las Vegas high school forensics competitors are leaving the state to compete at the collegiate level. To counter this emigration trend of students, most often to California, Murphy believes a UNLV-sponsored debate workshop is a realistic, inexpensive form of outreach. Some UNLV debaters have already initiated involvement in high school forensics laboratory activities with positive results. This outreach activity began during the 1983-84 and 1984-85 academic years, when two graduate students in the UNLV Department of Communication Studies were coaching the program, a point which shall be addressed later.

The final paper presented addresses similar points regarding cooperation among college and high school forensics programs. It is titled, "Maintaining a Trend of Excellence: Recruitment from High School Forensics Programs," by Professors David C. Gaer of the University of Nebraska and Shawnalee A. Whitney of the University of Southern Colorado. They strongly believe that cooperation is a must so forensics in their respective regions can survive and prosper. Inexpensive means of recruiting are easily attained through a progressive outreach program to high schools.

Professor Whitney conducted a survey in her region among selected high school forensics students. She found that 71 percent of them were aware that regional forensics programs existed, and many felt they could compete at the college level. Each professor stresses the importance of colleges and universities sponsoring high school tournaments and workshops. Their research indicates that competitors in high school tournaments do not view them as recruiting devices. A positive atmosphere by college coaches and team members to high school students and coaches can result in a constant flow of outstanding talent into their forensics programs.

Finally, I wish to add my perspective to this outstanding group of papers. My last comment in the paper by Professor Murphy mentioned two UNLV graduate students who coached a fledgling debate program and conducted high school outreach programs almost a decade ago. Those students were Professor Glenn and me. In the spring

semester of 1983, Glenn, a beginning graduate student, felt the academic reputation of UNLV would be enhanced through the reinstatement of a collegiate forensics program which had been dormant for years. Glenn had been a quarterfinalist at CEDA nationals as an undergraduate at the University of Southern California. He received funding from a variety of sources and solicited student participation, and the UNLV Debate and Forensics Squad became a reality during the fall 1983 semester.

It was at this time that I entered UNLV as a graduate student and was asked by Glenn to serve as Associate Director of Forensics. The UNLV Debate and Forensics Squad, operating with little funds and primarily novice members, was incredibly successful. It won more than 100 awards in the two years we coached the program, including the Brady Lee Garrison Newcomers Award as the top-ranked first-year CEDA program in the nation for 1983-84. The program was heavily involved in outreach to both Las Vegas high schools and those located outside the metropolitan area. The inaugural UNLV high school tournament was held in the fall 1984 semester. At the time Glenn and I received our M.A. degrees in 1985, some graduating Las Vegas high school seniors who had competed in the tournament had decided to enroll at UNLV.

Glenn and I complemented each other well as UNLV forensics coaches with our diverse backgrounds in speech, outreach and recruitment. I had won a number of awards in two years of

competition as a high school student in Paxton, Illinois. This experience included serving in an outreach capacity to central Illinois high school undergraduates in 1976 by judging a novice speech tournament in Bloomington during my senior year.

At the collegiate level, I competed in individual events during my senior year at North Dakota State University. The NDSU Lincoln Speech and Debate Society involved itself in outreach activities in part by hosting a high school speech and debate tournament each year. I stumbled across two telling quotes concerning the importance of high school recruitment when recently perusing one of my 1980 NDSU journalism assignments. C.T. Hanson, then director of forensics, is quoted as saying, "A lot of the kids that will compete here have real talent, and will go on to perform at the collegiate forensic level as well." Robert Littlefield, then associate director of forensics, is also quoted as saying, "We're representing the university and want to put our best foot forward. If they're impressed with our forensic program as well as the campus, some of them may decide to attend SU."

Forensics serves many important educational benefits at the college and high school levels. It encompasses the two most important qualities individuals need to become successful in society: writing and speaking. Recruitment efforts are an essential and inexpensive method of ensuring the long-term success of collegiate forensics programs. The examples discussed and

responded to here clearly demonstrate the worth of forensics as one of the best educational activities high school and college students can participate in. It is essential that high school programs be funded by institutions of higher education in some form, as they are the ultimate benefactors of such outreach.